This essay is about Alexandra Korsakova-Rudovich, better known to us today as the artist and designer Alexandra Nikolaevna Korsakova (1904-90), one of Vladimir Tatlin's most talented and constant disciples and his wife from 1944 until his death in 1953 (Fig. 95). Until very recently the fact that Korsakova had been an accomplished dancer and a representative of the new plastic movement in the 1920s had been quite forgotten, and one aim of this essay is to redress the imbalance. The reader must forgive the personal tone of my discourse, but these descriptions and assessments of Korsakova-Rudovich as an artist and dancer derive almost exclusively from my personal conversations with her in Moscow in the 1970s and 1980s.

I first made the acquaintance of Korsakova-Rudovich in 1965 when I was conducting my early research on Tatlin, but we became closer in the 1980s when I began to work on several publications and exhibitions concerning the Russian avant-garde and Tatlin's contribution.1 I visited Korsakova-Rudovich often, but she never disclosed much about her life, and, perhaps because of this, was the subject of many legends and myths, some of which she encouraged herself. Indeed, Korsakova liked to fantasize and to blur the dividing-line between fact and fiction, although we do know that she was born in the village of Korsakovo in Nizhnii-Novgorod Province, moving to Moscow at the age of seventeen. But in spite of her tender age, Korsakova-Rudovich seems to have recognized the achievements of the avant-garde immediately, so much so that later on in life she gave the impression of having been an organic part of that generation and of breathing the same heady ether as did David Burliuk, Velimir Khlebnikov, Nikolai Kliuev, Vladimir Maiakovsky, Kazimir Malevich, Vsevolod Meierkhold, and Tatlin. In any case, although Korsakova-Rudovich attended private art studios, she seems not to have received a degree or diploma and to have made her living as just another newspaper and magazine illustrator and commercial designer. At one

1. As coorganizer of the Tatlin retrospective at the Städtische Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf, in 1989-90, I was able arrange for an exhibition of Korsakova-Rudovich's works there, i.e., "Alexandra Nikolajewna Korsakowa. Ausgewählte Zeichnungen und Gouachen." In connection with these events Korsakova-Rudovich visited Düsseldorf.
time she was an assistant draftswoman in Lev Rudnev's architectural studio. She had a one-woman exhibition in 1938 under the name Alexandra Rudovich, a name that she conserved in 1948-53 while she was collaborating with Tatlin and as a member of the Union of Artists of the USSR, although she signed her paintings and drawings "Korsakova" (Figs. 96, 97). During the war Korsakova-Rudovich worked as a designer for the movies and in 1946, under Tatlin’s supervision, made the costumes for the corps-de-ballet in a production of Samuil Marshak's Twelve Months. Tatlin involved her as designer in at least ten stage productions and his artistic and personal influence on her was transformative.

Until the end of her days Alexandra Nikolaevna was energetic, visionary, and full of projects. When I saw her for the last time at the end of April 1990, she even asked me to help her go to America so as to "wipe off the cobwebs," and on another visit shortly before that she revealed one of her most remarkable secrets to me: "Do you know that I used to be a ballerina?" she asked as I was about to leave. I murmured a polite compliment, to which she responded: "No, it's true. I used to be a celebrated ballerina when I was a young girl, and an acrobat, too. Let me show you." We passed from the kitchen into her tiny bedroom and she started to search for something in two or three large boxes full of folders, books, and papers. But she could not find what she had been looking through before I came in, so I offered to lend a hand and together we found the folder that she wanted containing a book, two old posters still folded up and a print of a scenic composition for dance to the music of Scriabin by Alexandra Exter. I knew the book—it was Alexei Sidorov's Sovremennyi tanets [Contemporary Dance] with its cover designed by Georgii Echeistov and the photograph of a female dancer glued on top (Fig. 59). I had long appreciated this book as a successful example of artistic synthesis from the 1920s in which author, designer, dancer, and photographer had pooled their resources; but now the book rivetted my

2. Korsakova-Rudovich worked there with Tatlin after World War Two when Rudnev was designing the highrise building for Moscow State University. They also worked with a design team on educational aids for the Agricultural Museum inside.

3. During 1946-53 Korsakova-Rudovich and Tatlin designed the following theatrical productions in various Moscow theaters: Captain Kostrov (1946), For Those at Sea (two versions, both 1947), Secretary of the Regional Committee (1947), Great Destiny, Enough Simplicity in Every Wise Man, Somewhere in Siberia (all 1948), Miraculous Treasure, Cup of Joy (both 1949-50), The Truth about His Father, Emissary of Peace (both 1950-51), and The Battle of Grunwald (early 1950s, unfinished).

4. A. Sidorov, Sovremennyi tanets (Moscow: Pervina, 1922). The front cover bears the date MCMXXIII, while the title-page bears the date 1922, a contradiction signifying that the book was printed at the end of 1922 and issued commercially at the beginning of 1923.